



Snowstorms and Iowa's High School State Basketball Tournaments Facts

Snowfall and the Girls and Boys High School State Basketball Tournaments go hand in hand. Often, we receive inquiries about expected snowfall during one or both of these tournaments. March snowfall in Iowa is quite common and to be expected. The nice thing about snowfall in March is that it won't stay around long.

The High School State Basketball Tournaments have moved around from town to town during their history, but this quick look at snowstorms during the tournaments will just examine climatological data for Des Moines from 1950 to the present and for the first two weeks of March. These two weeks should generally capture any snowstorms over the last 55 years that might have affected travel to and from the tournaments.

The following tables depict the top 10 24-hour snowfall totals, 48-hour snowfall totals and Week 1 and Week 2 snowfall totals for Des Moines from the period 1950-2005.

Week of March 1-7					
Ranking	24-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date	Ranking	48-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date
1.	7.8	03/05/1959	1.	8.6	03/05-06/1959
2.	7.5	03/02/1965		8.6	03/04-05/1959
3.	4.6	03/03/1982	3.	7.5	03/02-03/1965
4.	4.4	03/04/2004		7.5	03/01-02/1965
5.	4.0	03/05/1963	5.	6.4	03/03-04/1982
6.	3.8	03/02/1978		6.4	03/02-03/1982
	3.8	03/05/1971	7.	5.5	03/03-04/2003
8.	3.2	03/01/2002	8.	4.8	03/02-03/2003
9.	3.1	03/06/1995	9.	4.7	03/04-05/2003
10	3.0	03/04/1980	10.	4.5	03/04-05/1963

The table above shows that in Des Moines, only two, single days and six, two-day periods over the last 55 years have received snowfalls greater than six inches in the first week of March. Six inches of snow is generally the point at which the National Weather Service would issue a Winter Storm Warning. In fact, the six two-day totals greater than six inches actually occurred in three years: 1959, 1965, and 1982. In other words, during this 55 year period, there were only three snowstorms, each spanning three days that



brought snowfall greater than six inches; or only 5% of the time. The other 95% of the time, in Des Moines, you can expect pretty good weather the first week of March.

Week of March 8-14					
Ranking	24-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date	Ranking	48-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date
1.	11.1	03/08/1999	1.	11.3	03/08-09/1999
2.	11.0	03/08/1998	2.	11.0	03/08-09/1998
3.	8.0	03/08/1962	3.	8.7	03/10-11/1951
4.	5.1	03/10/1951	4.	8.0	03/08-09/1962
5.	4.9	03/08/1960		8.0	03/11-12/1951
6.	4.4	03/12/1951	6	5.7	03/08-09/1960
7.	4.2	03/14/1959	7.	5.1	03/09-10/1951
8.	3.6	03/08/1982	8.	4.6	03/12-13/1951
	3.6	03/11/1951	9.	4.2	03/13-14/1959
10	3.4	03/13/1961	10.	3.8	03/12-13/1961

Similarly, for the second week of March, there were only three, single days and five, two-day periods over the last 55 years that Des Moines has received snowfalls greater than six inches. Two of the five two-day periods of snow greater than six inches occurred on three consecutive days: March 8-12, 1951 and the rest occurred over four days during the big snowstorm of 1951. Again, around 95% of the time, in Des Moines, during the second week of March, you can expect nice weather.

Week of March 1-7			Week of March 8-14		
Ranking	Amount (inches)	Year	Ranking	Amount (inches)	Year
1.	11.8	1965	1.	13.3	1951
2.	9.5	1955	2.	12.3	1999
3.	8.2	1982	3.	11.8	1998
4.	6.3	1978	4.	8.5	1962
5.	6.2	1952	5.	8.4	1960
6.	5.5	2002	6.	6.7	1961
7.	5.3	1995	7.	5.3	1959
	5.3	2003	8.	3.7	1982
9.	4.5	1963	9.	2.7	1970
10.	4.2	1971	10.	2.6	1980



1951 again bubbles to the top of the heap for the weekly snowfall totals for the second week of March, although the recent years of 1999 and 1998 rank second and third, respectively. The first week of March in 1965 also brought a lot of snow, with the second and third rankings somewhat less. Once again, only five of the last 55 years worth of March 1-7 (10%) have experienced greater than six inches of snow. The second week of March has seen only one more – six – during that time period or 11%. Overall, while central Iowa might in fact have a big snowstorm in the first half of March, it's much more likely that little to no snow will fall and ruin your Basketball Tournament travel plans. Before heading out, remember to check the latest forecasts and travel conditions so you may make informed decisions regarding travel and types of clothing to pack. Above all, have a safe and fun time.